

Loop 202 advisors have just months left

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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The citizen team advising the Arizona Department of Transportation on an updated route for the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway may have only months left to influence the design before the plan goes to Washington, D.C. for final approval.

But last week, the 21-member South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team couldn't even muster the 11 people for a quorum, even though the agenda included important items that needed to be decided before the team could move forward.

And of the nine people who did attend the May 24 meeting at ADOT headquarters in downtown Phoenix, several said they would quit rather than drive to Ahwatukee Foothills for future meetings.

The frustration among team members, who feared that getting a quorum might be difficult, and ADOT officials who want to see the end of the environmental impact study that began in 2002, was evident at the meeting, particularly when the subject of shifting meetings to Ahwatukee Foothills was brought up.

"I'll resign if we have (meetings) in Ahwatukee," said Laura Pendergast, who represents Laveen for Sensible Development. Several other members from the west side agreed, saying that with gasoline at more than \$3 a gallon and rush hour traffic, a 5:30 p.m. meeting at Pecos Park Community Center would be expensive and difficult to make.

A special meeting was scheduled for June 7 at the ADOT office to discuss meeting locations, but more importantly, if additional groups should be added to the team.

Several Ahwatukee Foothills members of the team want to add medical experts who can discuss the health impacts of the freeway while several west side business representatives want to see the East Valley Partnership and the Chandler Chamber of Commerce added to the team.

But with no quorum, that question has been put on hold until next week.

ADOT officials want the membership decision resolved quickly, so the team can get to the meat and potatoes of the study, including if the freeway should be elevated, depressed or at ground level, the impact of air quality on residents and how the freeway will impact traffic both on Interstate 10 and on local streets.

"You don't have time to talk about everything in great detail," ADOT spokesman Tim Tait said, adding that once a draft environmental impact statement, now being reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration, has been accepted, there will only be 45 days left to finish all public input, including comments from the team.

That could be as early as March, Tait said, which means all studies and comments will have to be completed at that time.

"There is certainly a level of urgency," Tait said. But even if ADOT gets federal permission

to extend the 45-day public comment period, “it won’t be open-ended.”

The citizens team was formed to advise ADOT in updating the 1985 transportation plan for the South Mountain Loop 202 from I-10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, west along Pecos Road, through South Mountain Park and then north along roughly 55th Avenue to reconnect with I-10 in the West Valley.

The \$1.1 billion project includes the destruction of 255 homes in Ahwatukee Foothills, partly because some homes were built in the right of way when ADOT didn’t buy the land from developers in the 1980s and partly because the freeway is bigger, now projected to be 10 lanes.

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